The Boston Computer Society

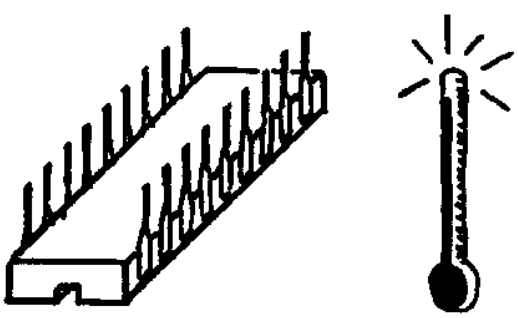
SINCLAIR-TIMEX USER GROUP NEWSLETTER

Volume 2, Issue 8 August 1983

This newsletter is produced to inform group members of the agenda and logistics for future meetings, as well as to recap and amplify the information provided at the last meeting. It also provides a forum for members and interested parties to communicate what they have learned or developed relating to Sinclair and Timex computer products. Meetings are open to the public; however, attendees are encouraged to join the Boston Computer Society (BCS). This newsletter is free to members. Back issues are one dollar each.

USER GROUP MEETING

Date: Wednesday, August 17, 1983
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Place: Large Science Auditorium
UMass, Harbor Campus
(Directions on last page)



At the August meeting, two software reviews will be presented. Brian Jefferis will review the Programmer's Tool Kit, a collection of machine language program development tools available from Softsync. Jack Hill will review Master Math, a high school math quiz available from PMI. Also, Sue Mahoney will demonstrate the T/S 1500 computer. There will be a period for short announcements before we separate into smaller, special interest groups. An advanced group and a beginner's group are planned.

FUTURE MEETINGS

We meet every month on the third Wednesday. The September meeting will be on the 21st. Frank Kaplan from Compusa Corporation of Mountain Side, New Jersey (formerly Centronic Corporation) will be in Boston to describe the disk controller his company has developed for the T/S 1000.

The October meeting will mark the second anniversary of the Sinclair-Timex User Group. Please give your ideas for this special meeting to Sue Mahoney or Allan Cohen. Remember that Allan is our Meeting Coordinator. If you have suggestions for presentations at a future meeting, please contact Allan or Sue Mahoney. Submissions for our newsletter still go to Cliff Danielson.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE JULY MEETING

Sue Mahoney distributed the second issue of Ramblings at the July meeting. Ramblings is a newsletter produced by Timex to which Sue is a major contributor. It is planned that it will be mailed to Timex Computer Club members. Membership in the Timex Computer Club is given to each person who has purchased a Timex computer product and returned the enclosed card, and to members of established user groups.

Sue also brought a bibliography of Sinclair-Timex books. Over 30 different books are currently available. Three U.S. and Canadian magazines can be found on the newsstands. In addition, newsletters produced by commercial and user organizations supply Sinclair-Timex information.

Sue also brought a catalog of T/S 1000 Series software and brochures for the T/S 1500 and T/S 2000 Series computers. The catalog identified 81 software offerings, ranging in price from $9.95 to $17.95, in four categories--home, business, education, and entertainment. Sue said Timex will be shipping both the T/S 1500 and T/S 2000s to the stores in August. Thus, you'll probably be able to purchase these in late September or early October. Sue had copies of the in-process user manuals for both machines. Both manuals are reportedly much improved over the manual for the T/S 1000.

Kathi Kuehn was introduced. She is the new Director of Member Program for the BCS. She is on the BCS staff, full-time devoted to coordinating the needs and activities of the now 27 user and special interest groups of the BCS. In addition, she has responsibilities for managing BCS exhibits and booths at shows, and for future member programs and development. We were pleased to have Kathi at our meeting and look forward to working with her.

The main event at the meeting was the demonstration of the Intercontroller HV (high voltage) Bus developed and marketed by Intercomputer, Inc. The product was introduced by Irv Frankel, Vice President of Intercomputer, and demonstrated by Arman Toorian. The Intercontroller is a device which plugs into the 110-Volt line and the Sinclair-Timex computer. Up to four appliances, such as lamps, can be plugged into the Intercontroller. The computer can then control the power to each of the appliances, individually, using POKEs to location 8192. PAUSEs can be used to control the time for switching the appliances off and on. The Intercontroller uses the computer's 9-Volt power supply and draws approximately 100 milliamperes. Inside the Intercontroller are solid state relays rated for 6 Amperes at 200 Volts ac. The Intercontroller sells for $99.95. Arman also demonstrated a product called the Softbox which will interfaces the computer with up to four Intercontrollers or other products developed by Intercomputer. Both products are available from Intercomputer, P.O. Box 90, Prudential Center, Boston, Massachusetts 02199, (617) 437-1190.

The spring issue of TEC News, a quarterly newsletter put together by users at Texas Wesleyan College, in cooperation with Timex, specifically for educators, was handed out at the meeting. TEC stands for Timex-Sinclair Educational Computing. This first issue included an article on the versitility of the T/S 1000 for education, a "Kids' Korner," a lesson for teachers explaining how to teach BASIC to first graders, a user section describing how to set up a classroom, and question and answers. We thank Dr. M. Mark Wasicsko, Associate Dean of the School of Education, for sending us the newsletters. If you are an educator and would like to get on the mailing list for this newsletter (free!), write Dr. Wasicsko at the School of Education, Texas Wesleyan College, Ft. Worth, Texas 76105.

TIME-OUT: From Dave Miller comes the following comment to "Does Anybody Know What Day It Is?" which appeared in the last newsletter. Your editor had added to Jack Hodgson's article that the year 2000 was not a leap year. In addition to that mistake, two lines should be corrected as shown below:

```
120 LET M=MTH+9
140 LET JDATE=INT((1461*Y)/4)+INT((153*M+2)/5)+DAY-1
```

2000 IS A LEAP YEAR by Dave Miller

The year 2000 is a leap year. The complete rule for leap years in the Gregorian calendar is any year divisible by 4 except century (centesimal) years, i.e., years divisible by 100, unless that century year is divisible by 400. 2000 is divisible by 400, so it is a leap year.

The program in last month's newsletter produces a valid result for any dates between March 1, 1900 and February 27, 2100, thus should be adequate for most applications. Below is a more general version of the same program which is valid for any dates since October 15, 1592. In 1592, Pope Gregory XIII established the current calendar by omitting 10 days from the previous calendar and ordering that the algorithm described above be used to determine leap years.

Even though the program below is valid for any date since 1592, do be careful with old dates. Early days in American history, for example, were based on the English calendar. It was not until September 14, 1752 that the Gregorian calendar was adopted. We pay taxes on April 15th instead of the first of the year, for example, because the date was based on the new year of the English calendar.

```
 20 PRINT "ENTER 1ST DATE: MMDDYYYY"
 30 PRINT "EX:  JAN. 2, 1983, 01021983"
 40 INPUT A$
 50 GOSUB 130
 60 LET F1=F
 70 PRINT ,,"ENTER 2ND DATE: (ENTER 0
TO EXIT)"
 80 INPUT A$
 90 IF VAL A$=0 THEN GOTO 120
100 GOSUB 130
110 PRINT ,,"DAYS BETWEEN DATES:"; STR$
(ABS (F-F1))
120 STOP
130 LET M=VAL A$( TO 2)
140 LET D=VAL A$(3 TO 4)
150 LET Y=VAL A$(5 TO 8)
160 IF M<=2 THEN LET F=365*Y+D+31*(M-1)
+INT ((Y-1)/4)-INT (3/4*(INT (((Y-1)/
100)+1)))
170 IF M>=3 THEN LET F=365*Y+D+31*(M-1)
-INT (.4*M+2.3)+INT (Y/4)-INT (3/4*(INT
(Y/100)+1))
180 LET J=F-(INT (F/7)*7)
190 LET B$="SATSUNMONTUEWEDTHUFRI"
200 PRINT ,,A$( TO 2);"/";A$(3 TO 4);
"/";A$(5 TO 8),B$(J*3+1 TO J*3+3)
210 RETURN
```

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WHAT'S BECOME OF THE SINCLAIR-TIMEX RETAIL NETWORK by Jack Hodgson

The retailing network for Sinclair-Timex products in Boston is in a shambles. For months now users have been asking the user group about where to buy Timex products and what Timex is doing about the situation. I've known for a while about the problem, but didn't realized how bad it was until I looked into it.

In the Boston area, there seem to be only a couple of places that are carrying the Timex line: Manufacturer's Marketplace in West Roxbury and Shermans on Bromfield Street in the downtown. Reportedly, the products are still available at some Sears and Service Merchandise stores. I've not been able to confirm this.

What Seems to Be the Problem Here?

Working from a list obtained through the Timex toll-free support number, I started calling stores to find out if they had the stuff, and if not, why. The Timex list, by the way, only contained one of the places that I found actually selling the products. It did contain the name of Star Market. Star Market is a supermarket chain. According to a person I contacted at the main office, Star Market "does not now, nor ever has sold any Timex products." However, Timex did say that the list "wasn't up to date."

Timex seems to have given up on finding retail stores to sell the printer paper. The first thing they did when I asked about the printer was to refer me to a mail-order address. Pardon the commentary, but I thought Timex got into this thing so we wouldn't have to deal with mail order any more!

Following is what I learned from the stores I contacted. Except where noted, I spoke to the sales people. The views are theirs and not necessarily those of their employer.

The Video Connection, which used to be one of the best sources of Sinclair-Timex products and information, has only a little software left. They are trying to sell out what's left. According to the salesman, "we are discontinuing..., there's not a hell of a lot of market in 'em. No one's interested."

A clerk at Bradlees told me that they were only temporarily out, and that "we expect to be getting more." But a different clerk said that "everything's been sent back to (Timex') warehouse."

Tech HiFi said they decided to discontinue because the computers "have become a price football. You can pick them up everywhere for below our cost, so it's no sense for us to try to sell them."

Medi Mart reported that they had a few left, but "we're not too happy with it. We've had lots of returns. It didn't do what people wanted it to." This was a common response. Medi Mart said many customers were hopelessly discouraged by the save/load and RAM-pack wobble problems and return their computers thinking they were broken.

At Zayres, a local discount department store, the story was: "We sent them back about a month and a half ago. They weren't selling. The VIC-20 is cheaper and better."

Markline cited "price competition" as their reason for discontinuing the line.

All was not negative. The Harvard Coop said they had sent back the T/S 1000s in anticipation of the arrival of the "new Sinclair computer, soon."

One Retailer's Analysis

Karen Levitt of The Bit Bucket, a computer store in Newton, seems to have given this all a lot of thought. "When it (the T/S 1000) first came out it was very viable, with the VIC-20 at $200. But now the retailer has zero margin." The cost of after-sale support, she explained, is usually built into the profit margin of a product. But when retailers are only making a couple of dollars profit on a product, they can't afford to spend time answering a lot of questions.

"We want to support our customers," Ms. Levitt continued, "but, with the Timex computer, we couldn't afford to. So we discontinued." She said that the buyer of a Sinclair-Timex computer now is "flushing $40 down the toilet because there's no support for the machine. To make matters worse, this computer requires the most support of any on the market. The buyers must realize that they're on their own."

I asked Ms. Levitt if The Bit Bucket heard any complaint from Timex or the distributor when they discontinued the product line? "Nope, not a word. And, as for us, we felt a sense of relief. We didn't have to turn away questioners anymore." She volunteered, "Your user group is the best thing going for the computer. It's the only place they (the consumer) can get the support they need."

Ms. Levitt said that The Bit Bucket didn't expect to carry the T/S 2000 Series computers when they come out. She felt there was "almost no hope" for a revival of the Timex computer as a widely distributed product line.

More in Sadness Than in Anger

I don't think there is "no hope," but I do think that things must change soon. The competition is fierce and the stakes are high. I believe in the Sinclair-Timex computer design and philosophy. It has a legitimate and valuable place in the personal computing community. But, if people can't buy them or get supplies for them, they will go elsewhere. I hope that the user community will not let this happen. Speak to your local retailer and encourage them to carry the product. They may not realize how popular it is, nor that many of the initial problems have been dealt with. One user in Oklahoma City has done just that with some success. Also, contact Timex and let them know that you love their computers but hate their marketing and they'd better get it in gear soon.

Not everyone is as cynical as I am about the situation. Seth McEvoy of the Compuserve Sinclair-Timex special interest group says, "I'm not so sure that the real situation is bleak. At least not for those who are willing to take a chance. I think that the computer field right now is in a panic over Atari's and TI's losses." He continued, "I don't think that Timex is dead when we have Sync, Timex/Sinclair User, and Syntax--three very lively magazines. After all there are what--two million Timex' in the world? Maybe three.... It is up to the programmers to write good programs. I believe if good ones are written someone will find a way to get them into enough hands. I am confident about the future of Timex."

Maybe in the final analysis a computer system must be supported not only by its manufacturer, but by its users. If we want, we can make a big contribution to the future of Sinclair-Timex computing in the U.S., but we've got to get involved.

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FOLLOW-UP TO COMPUTER IN A DRAWER

Last month we featured Werner Horlbeck's computer system. Following are answers to several questions we received about the information presented. Werner designed a power supply which fits neatly in a drawer with his computer and powers both his T/S 1000 and his tape recorder. The power supply uses a 12.5-Volt center-tapped transformer from Radio Shack. Werner rectified (full-wave) the output of the transformer and filtered the rectified signal with a 300 microfarad capacitor. When rectified, the output was much greater than required by the computer. Thus Werner used an adjustable voltage regulator chip (Radio Shack part number 317) to drop the output dc voltage to 9 Volts. He did the same for a center-tapped signal (6.25 Volts) to derive a regulated 6 Volts for the tape recorder.

Synchronize is located in Kerrville, Texas (a typographical error). The adhesive key tops for Werner's large keyboard were purchased from Mule Electronics, Venice, California. Both Synchronize and Mule Electronics have advertised in past issues of Sync. If you would like further information about Werner's system, he welcomes your calls, (617) 252-3956.

MACHINE LANGUAGE GROUP

The Sinclair-Timex machine language special interest group will meet at 7:00 p.m. on September 7 at ITEK Optical Systems in Lexington. Contact Bob Heath for details and directions. He can be reached during the day at (617) 276-2424.

ZX COMPUTING

There is a new magazine on the newsstands in the Boston area, specifically at Out-of-Town News and Nini's Corner in Harvard Square, Cambridge. It is ZX Computing, a bimonthly (every 2 months) publication from the United Kingdom. It features articles about, and programs for, all of the Sinclair computers. It contains lots of programs listings, many for the Spectrum. It also has lots of U.K. advertisements. ZX Computing is much larger than any of the U.S. magazines and, for $3.75 per issue, it is a very worthwhile investment.

DECIMAL TO FRACTIONS by Dave Miller

Below is a program which will convert a decimal value, less than 1.0, to a fraction. The fraction is to the nearest 1/64th. This program should be useful in scaling dimensions when working with wood or metal. The program tells you to cut a piece which would be 0.197 inches, for example, to 13/64 inches. Note that, if you change M in line number 40 to a different value, it is possible to get different fractions.

```
 10 CLS
 20 PRINT "DECIMAL?"
 30 INPUT D
 31 PRINT D
 40 LET M=64
 50 LET A=INT (D*M+.5)
 60 LET C=A/2
 70 IF INT (C+.5)<>C OR C=0 THEN GOTO 100
 80 LET M=M/2
 90 LET A=A/2
 95 GOTO 60
100 PRINT A;"/";M
110 PRINT "DIFFERENCE:";INT (1E4*(A/M-D)+.5)/1E4
```


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DIRECTIONS TO THE MEETING: The Sinclair-Timex User Group meets in the Large Science Auditorium (Room 8/2/009) of the University of Massachussetts of Boston, Harbor Campus. The Harbor Campus is only 3 miles from downtown Boston and easily accessible by public and private transportation. From the north or west, take the Southeast Expressway to Exit 17. Turn left onto Columbia Road. Enter the rotary and take the first right (Morrissey Boulevard). Bear right on the traffic island, following UMass/Boston sign. Turn left into the Campus. From the south, take Morrissey Boulevard northward to the campus. On the MBTA, take the Red Line (Ashmont Train) to Columbia Station. Transfer to the free University shuttlebus in the T parking lot.

The Boston Computer Society

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